

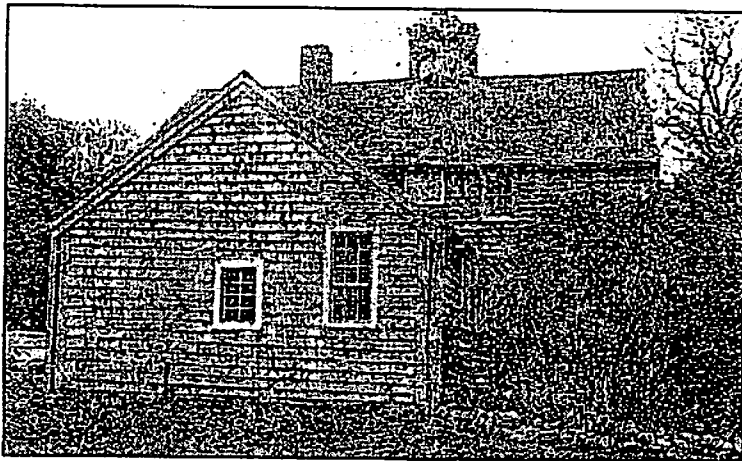
Alden House Nears National Landmark Status

By ADAM SWIFT

The John and Priscilla Alden Family Sites are on their way to being named a National Historic Landmark, which would make them the first sites to earn that designation in Duxbury.

The sites include the Alden House, which was built in 1700 and still stands today on Alden Street, and the original Alden Homestead site of 1630, which is located behind the middle school.

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The Alden House Historic Site on Alden Street has cleared the biggest hurdle on its way to being named a National Historic Landmark.

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The Alden properties have already cleared the biggest hurdle on the way to historical landmark status, having won a positive recommendation from the Landmarks Committee of the National Park System's advisory board. The advisory board is scheduled to make its recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior, who will then make a final decision on the landmark status.

"We first started talking about the idea of the Alden Kindred properties, with the existing house and the archeological site behind the junior high school, having national significance at the beginning of this decade," said Tom McCarthy, an Alden descendant and U.S. Naval Academy history professor who put together the nomination for the Alden properties. "Things really came together, though, three or four years ago when Jim Baker left Plimoth Plantation to become the curator at the Alden House."



The original site of John and Priscilla Alden's home, located behind the middle school, as well as the Alden House built in 1700, have cleared the biggest hurdle in being named national historic landmarks.

The Alden sites are already among the more than 65,000 historic sites on the National Register of Historic Places.

To be included on the more exclusive list of landmarks, McCarthy said, he had to show that the Alden sites transcend local prominence and are of national historic significance. There are about 2,500 National Historic Landmarks, he said.

Alden Ringquist, director of the Alden Kindred, said it's a great honor to be considered for landmark status.

"We're very excited that this looks like it's about to happen," he said.

McCarthy said there are three main reasons why the property reaches that level of national historical significance.

"This property owes its prominence to the national cultural impact of *The Courtship of Myles Standish*, a poem about the courtship of John Alden and Priscilla Mullins published in 1858 by

their descendant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," McCarthy said.

"At the time, Longfellow was the most popular poet in the English speaking world," McCarthy said. "He was Queen Victoria's favorite poet, and when he put out a new collection of poems, it would sell thousands of copies a day."

When "*The Courtship of Myles Standish*" was released, it was immediately one of Longfellow's most popular works, and people began searching for a connection to the lives of Alden and Mullins.

Another major reason the Alden sites were considered for landmark status is because no other site is so prominently associated with Alden.

"Alden held positions of high economic and political importance for almost the entire 71-year history of the Plymouth Colony, a span of public service unrivaled in 17-century colonial America and perhaps in the entire colonial period," McCarthy said. "He served in the colony in almost every available capacity save that of governor, although he served as deputy or acting governor on two occasions."

Lastly, McCarthy said, the Original Alden Homestead is

a site of national significance with regard to the history of archeology, having been located and excavated by Roland Wells Robbins, a pioneer in the field of historical archaeology, in 1960.

Ringquist said there are a number of positives associated with the landmark status, including a greater likelihood for grants. Ringquist also praised selectmen and town officials for their help in securing the landmark status.

Research that went into the landmark nomination also helped lead to a greater understanding of the Alden House, even if some of that knowledge was a little disappointing.

"Traditionally, the construction date for the house had been 1653, suggesting it was built by John," McCarthy said.

Scientific analysis of the wood beams, however, put the construction date closer to 1700. Even with that bit of news, Ringquist said they are excited about the pending landmark status.

The presentation of the National Historic Landmark could take place at the Alden kindred's next reunion in August if all goes well, McCarthy said.